



## Someplace To Find Rest by Val-Creative

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**Summary:** They should have known there would be other national laboratories out of state. All of them would be under different alias and government funding, but with the same endgame: Reopen one of the Gates. El faces her Papa one last time, dealing with the fallout on her and Mike. /Post-Season 2. Mileven. Oneshot.

## Someplace To Find Rest

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They should have known there would be other national laboratories out of state.

All of them would be under different alias and government funding, but with the same endgame:

*Reopen one of the Gates.*

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After several months of tracking a nearest location and the occasional information exchange from Dr. Sam Owens — a now retired member of the research lab formerly situated within Indiana — Hopper leaves to investigate twelve miles deep of West Virginia forest on his own.

"It sticks out like a big ole sore thumb." Hopper clenches his limp, unlit cigarette between his teeth, slapping a hand right on the map. "More guards and soldiers patrol it, so you *know* there's something big about to go down. Owens was right about Brenner... he's definitely running things."

He says nothing about bringing her along, not to Joyce, not to anyone.

El knows better than to ask. Instead, she climbs into the back of the rattling, grey van, without his knowledge. Without his permission. The problem turns out to be Mike *sneezing* while they're veering down a long, gravel road.

She winces visibly, raising a hand and trying to blink through the shine of a flashlight, as someone pulls the dark blue tarp off their heads.

"Are you two *KIDDING* me right now?" Hopper yells, as she hops out of the van, turning to face him. Even the darkness of the forest, El can see the anger reddening and stiffening his features. "What the *HELL* do you think you're doing—?"

"I—"

Hopper then aims his high-powered flashlight for Mike's face. He glares outright as the teenage boy scoots out on his dirtied hands and knees. "Was this *your* idea?"

"What are you blaming me for?!" Mike yells back, gesturing furiously.

El presses her lips together, frantically shaking her head.

"Hey—" she speaks up again, with neither of them seeming to pay any attention to her.

"This could get her *killed*! Did you think about that?" Hopper bellows, and Mike doesn't even flinch. "You want that on your conscience?"

"It could get *you* killed, too—!"

"Hey! *HEY!*" El screams out, her cheeks flushed bright red. She stomps her foot onto the gravel, breathing hard as they stare around at her. "Don't fight each other," she demands, sounding firm. "I came. I decided. Mike followed me to protect me."

A burst of wheezing, short-lived laughter escapes Hopper's mouth.

"He can't *protect* you..."

"Then why are you teaching him to shoot?" El asks, straightening up and frowning. "*Why* did you let Mike keep one of your guns?"

Hopper just gazes over her and laughs again, rubbing his fingers over his beard, like he can't believe what he's now hearing.

"Because it's... it's..." he falters. It had been weeks ago. El knows he's been taking Mike to a shooting range, helping him practice. More of Hopper's anger rises up, compelling him to bang a palm on the van's rusted siding. "*Goddammit*, this isn't a game!" Hopper shouts louder.

El's frown softens.

"I know," she says, refusing to lower her eyes.

Hopper's face stiffens again, and this time, she watches fear and a deep grief overcome him.

His arms engulf her, surrounding El in the odor of worn leather and nicotine, as her refuge. "I can't lose you," Hopper whispers against her. For a moment, El dreads to know if he's crying. "I can't... I *can't* lose my little girl again."

El's arms hook around his middle, clutching on and fiercely hugging him. Her eyes stinging hot.

"... I know."

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Despite the volume of their argument, nobody discovers them.

It's a Thursday night during her first year of high school. El breathes in the crisp night air drifting into the junk van's rolled-down window.

"Are you sure about this?"

Mike's voice filters in. She concentrates on the starry, black skyline above the treetops. "Papa's in there," El murmurs, nodding towards the gigantic, shadowy building fenced in. "I have to stop him."

There's finality in how she says it. El knows she's come so far — being *normal*, be free of Eleven and her tattooed identity, finding a home and friends and *love* to shield and comfort her. It'll mean absolutely nothing if the bad men won't be stopped.

Hopper checks his ammo from the backseat, and his rifle. "We're right behind you, kid," he says quietly, touching her shoulder briefly.

El smiles faintly, looking ahead, tightly squeezing Hooper's warm hand against her.

"You remember the plan?"

"Don't get separated," she recites. El's fingers seek out Mike's and wrap them into hers. His skin clammy and sweaty. "Don't get caught."

"Stay where I can see you," Hopper tells her sternly. "There's reinforcements coming. We just need to trap him — and not be in the way of the *good* men when they drag his ass out of there."

El glances over to Mike steeling himself, listening to the rest of Hopper's instructions. He's wearing a striped green polo, like from the arcade; his dark bangs rest untidy against his forehead. A thin stripe of malted milk chocolate against the corner of Mike's mouth.

He shouldn't be here, she realizes. El's heart races so fast it thrums against her ribcage.

"Mike..."

He notices the uneasiness, shaking his head in clear, unapologetic protest. "We already snuck our way here. I'm not going back. Whatever happens, we go together," Mike reminds her, smiling. "You said that. Did you mean it, El?"

"Yes," she admits, smiling for a moment, tilting her head.

"Then I'm not leaving you. I promised."

His genuine encouragement is enough for her, to grip her own fists in her lap and close her eyes. El imagines herself slipping into the low-lit, monochromatic darkness of her psychic space, visualizing him.

*Papa ! PAPA! — the memories brighten behind her eyelids — herself writhing and shrieking, attempting to break out of the hands slamming her down against the examination table — Papa staring down at her without expression —*

She wades into the black, shimmery waters, coming up to a switchboard and a man with white hair giving orders to someone else.

El takes a deep breath and widens her scope mentally, searching for

more clues around him.

Brenner's eyes flick up, suddenly glued on her. He *can't* see her.

It feels like a punch in the abdomen. She lurches in the front seat, gasping aloud, her dark brown eyes opening impossibly big. Hopper leaps out of the van, thrusting open her door and grasping onto her as a confused, terrified Mike seizes both of El's hands.

"El? What happened—are you okay?"

"... .. I saw him," she mutters darkly, tugging away and wiping the blood leaking from her nostril.

Hopper's eyes follow the path of El's forefinger motioning up to the ominously glowing building. "Right at the tippy top, huh?" He grumbles to himself, digging in his puffed coat-pockets for the cigarette box lumped inside. "*Great...*"

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El is sure she's never been down these corridors, but they all look the same to her.

The same ones the bad men escorted her down, where Papa spoke softly in her ear. He gently scooped her up with one arm, carrying her to testing and labs when she had been a *good* girl and obeyed. Now she's crawling through sewage drains and pipes, with other people, hoping to not be detected.

Hopper curses a little, eyeing the line of security cameras.

"They're gonna see us coming."

With a nudge of her abilities, El drains the power from them, shutting them down. "No, they won't," she says knowingly. "Not now."

Up another four stories of the building, Hopper's radio crackles with static and voices. The hallway lights dim, flashing golden-yellow and alarms roaring to life. The pop of gunfire in the distance.

"*Shit.*"

Hopper shoves them ahead of him, glancing around with his rifle aimed at everything a possible threat. When three men in similar white uniforms rush towards them, yelling and lifting their firearms, Hopper begins shooting.

To El's astonishment, Mike does the same with the handgun once tucked under his belt.

He levels his weapon and squeezes the trigger, panicking and shooting the nearest man right in the kidneys.

It's noise and chaos. Brenner's soldiers and guards come from the elevators, only to be swarmed and gunned down by the US military forces — their uniforms dark as the starry, cloudless night. El sprints down another flashing, yellowed corridor, breathing hard.

To her horror, she notices she's been somehow left on her own.

"Mike!" El yells at the top of her lungs. "Mike! Mike, where are you?! *MIKE—!*"

Heavy footsteps.

"*Eleven...*"

She freezes in place, turning her head. A man with white hair and a pristine, white suit approaches her.

"Papa?" El murmurs, dismayed.

"It's so good to see you. You've come home."

"No," she says sharply, causing Brenner to hesitate. It sounds much braver than how she feels, seeing him face-to-face like this. Her stomach feels churning and nauseated. "No. No more, Papa."

He tuts sympathetically, taking another step forward. El shrinks away on instinct, lips trembling.

"It's alright. I'm not going to hurt you," Brenner says, his voice



soothing and consoling. "You've grown up so much. Let me take a look at you." She wants to run when he's in front of her, wants to fight him or scream. To do anything but *stand* there, more and more petrified.

Brenner lifts El's chin with a tap of his fingers.

"You're becoming a fine young woman," he murmurs, starting to smile. "I'm so *proud*."

El finally leans away, tensing and exhaling. Her eyes filling quickly with warm, unshed tears.

"Stop..."

"Why do you think I let you find me?" Brenner tells her, examining her studiously. "You can help me. You can help all of us."

No, *no*.

She shakes her head wildly.

"S...*stop!*"

El tries to wrench herself from him, crying out when Brenner twists her arm painfully, yanking her jacket-sleeve up her forearm. Instead of **011** glaring, it's a tiny, fragile butterfly. It's Kali, and it's Hopper, and it symbolizes *her* freedom and her family.

Brenner's mouth twists into a frown.

"Oh, my dear. Do you really think hiding your true name would change anything?"

He lets her go when El chokes back a sob and pulls free, tears spilling down her cheeks. She feels *weak*. She's frightened for Hopper and Mike and for herself, but El's voice croaks out determinedly, "My... *name*... is Jane. I'm Jane."

Brenner shushes her, cupping and petting the side of her face. "Your name is *Eleven*. You belong with your Papa," he reaffirms calmly.

"You took me away from Mama... you *hurt* her."

El snuffles, watching him kneel down in front of her. "I was doing what was best, for you and for the world. We were going to save it." Brenner's thumbs wipe off the gleaming moisture under her swollen, red eyes. "We still can," he says.

*No...*

Despite repeating it over and over, in her mind, El finds herself whimpering and leaning in. *Papa*.

Mike skids around from another abandoned hallway.

"We gotta go, El! They're coming!" he shouts.

Brenner narrows his eyes, staring over El's head and climbing back onto his feet. Her heart jumps completely into her throat. "Mike, please—go!" El yells, but even she's not sure what to do now. How to stop any of this. How to stop being *afraid*.

How to stop Brenner wordlessly tugging a pistol from his holster, and firing a bullet straight into Mike's chest.

At first, it doesn't feel real. None of it. It feels like the whole thing happens in slow-motion, existing out of time and space... El witnessing Mike's body spin around by the force, and collapsing onto the floor.

He doesn't get back up.

El's mouth hangs open, as she stares breathlessly at Mike, her head spinning.

There's... nothing inside her. No feeling, no emotion.

Just... *nothing*.

"See what you've done?" Brenner scolds her lightly. "You must learn. You must learn there are going to be consequences for your actions."

Hot, blinding tears continue to drip steadily down her face. He's

about to grab her shoulder, to lead her away, when the overhead, flashing lights go still, brightening, whirring louder and louder. El's psychokinetic abilities flux beyond control, spreading its influence to all ends of West Virginia, illuminating all of the street and traffic lights, lamps, electronics, nightlights.

At the center of it all, she throws her head back and shrieks a high, animalistic noise, the very foundations of the lab quaking and thundering.

Her shrieks heighten, finally matching the pitch of the whirring, before the overhead lights shatter and explode down upon them. The alarms turn from yellow to a crimson, glaring red, as Brenner's soldiers rush down the corridor, preparing to fire.

El raises a hand above her.

She clenches her trembling, pale fingers as the white-uniformed soldiers panic and hovers towards the ceiling, struggling. Bones snap apart; human meat and fluid trickling, liquefying out of their orifices. She rotates her arm slowly, closing her fist.

All of their bodies fall onto the ground with multiple smacks and thuds, as men gurgle, dying.

El's blood flows heavily from her nostrils, clotting her ears.

The life vanishes from her red-rimmed eyes, crawling with pitch darkness, her pupils blown.

*We go together, Mike.*

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The situation has gotten a thousand times harder to navigate.

Hopper yells for El and Mike, barreling down the darkened, long hallways pulsing in red. They've lost the element of surprise, and he's seen way too many dead bodies piling up.

Among them, he spots the carnage of Brenner's soldiers, their insides on their outsides... but also not far from them, familiar stripes of green.

"Mike!" he yells, throwing down his rifle. "Hey, kid! *Kid!*"

For a moment, Hopper assumes the worst — until Mike cringes and gulps for air.

There's no bleeding, which probably means a rubber bullet due to the ugly, new bruising on his right side. Hopper lowers the hem of Mike's shirt. "*Shit*, kid. Okay. No getting up, you hear me? You might have a busted rib."

Mike ignores him, attempting to roll sideways.

"*Where's... El?*"

Hopper shakes his head, looking up at the mass of dead bodies and gore-stains.

No sign of Brenner.

"I don't know."

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*Black hole.*

It sucks everything in and destroys it. The titanium-plated, sliding doors leading to another hallway crunch apart, stripping from existence. What remains goes flying into the air, crashing and injuring more soldiers trailing after her.

El walks through the entrance. Heated and flaming sparks erupt behind her, all of the walls groaning as if threatening to collapse.

More men appear to incapacitate or kill her, eventually fleeing in terror, screaming, dragged by an invisible force and tossed aside like rag dolls. Their necks brutally snapped.

Red, *red* blood gushes down El's chin and mouth.

Nobody can stand in her way now.

"El!"

Mike rushes around her, touching her shoulders. He doesn't recoil from the sight of her. His features harden with determination, Mike's hands clutching on.

"El, it's me," he insists. "Can you hear me? El, *please*, you have to stop. This isn't you."

She only stares ahead of him, as if Mike isn't there at all, trying to walk forward again. He follows her, walking backwards, staring into her.

"Remember when you made Troy pee his pants in front of the assembly?" Mike asks, beginning to grin at the memory. "Or when you closed the Gate? Or when you found Will in the Upside Down? *You* did that, El."

The admiration and softness of Mike's tone echoes sonorously through the noise and chaos, reverberating inside El's skull.

"You saved him," Mike reminds her, nodding when she halts. "You saved *me*, El. I could have died when I went off the cliff, but I *didn't*. You saved me."

The bulging, blackened veins slowly disappear from El's face, fading away.

"I..." she breathes out, as if waking from a dream. "Couldn't *save* you..."

Mike's injuries moan as a reminder, piercing with agony under his skin. He swallows hard, holding onto one of El's hands securely and pressing it over his heart.

"I'm here," Mike whispers. "I'm right here with you."

El's blood-crusting mouth opens. "*Bad*." Her voice shaking with

realization. "I'm... *bad*."

"No, El. You're not. This isn't your fault."

"It is," Brenner says, gazing between them, disapproving. "Lying to her will only make it more difficult. Eleven needs to know the truth."

El's pupils remain dark and wide, but the tears falling down her face... start to tinge bloody red.

"Why are you doing this to her?!" Mike snaps.

"The Gate must be reopened. Only she can do that. This is doing a service to the greater good."

"By *killing* everyone?! El doesn't want this!"

Brenner's mouth tightens. "I'm releasing her potential, young man. Something you don't understand, but I do. I have watched her. That raw and terrible power inside her." He sneers. "I am giving my daughter what she needs."

"There's one problem with that—"

A grim-faced Hopper appears beside him, punching Brenner directly across the face.

"—she's *MY* daughter, you son of a bitch," Hopper mutters.

US military forces, with their dark, starless uniforms, swam and crowd everyone, disarming Brenner. El shudders, rolling her eyes and fainting.

"*El!*" Mike howls out, thrashing violently when Hopper grabs him rigidly around the waist, allowing the paramedics to check on her. "*El—LET ME GO, YOU BASTARD! EL—!*"

His howling dissolves into full-bodied, heartbreaking sobbing, as one of the women pries open El's slackened mouth and blows in air, giving her CPR. Another paramedic desperately pumps El's chest, swearing under his breath. Hopper sinks to the floor with Mike, his speechless disbelief growing.

It seems to last forever.

El jerks back to consciousness, grimacing into the woman's mouth. Her eyes flutter open, revealing pupils shrinking and dilating.

"Welcome back," the female paramedic says encouragingly. "Can you tell me your name?"

There's blood and salty sweat on her tongue. El squints her face, answering quietly.

"... *Jane L. Hopper*."

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There's no more monsters to track. According to the officials, the rest of the illegally run laboratories are being quickly shut down, one-by-one.

"You sure you don't want me to tag along?" Joyce asks worriedly, leaning over the car-seat.

El understands why Joyce wants to, but she shakes her head.

"I won't take a long time," El says dully, shutting the passenger side's door.

Dr. Sam Owens meets her by the guard post, showing her inside the maximum security prison. "I'll be behind the door, if you need me," he says, allowing her inside the colorless, stuffy room.

Brenner sits patiently behind a single, steel table, his wrists chained.

"Come to say goodbye?" he speaks up, unmoving.

El doesn't join him, but rests her hands upon the table, staring him in the eyes and nodding.

"Yes."

"I had so much hope for you. You showed so much promise."

Something in El's gut flickers alive — *hatred, love, despair*. "We could have built something together." Brenner raises his eyebrows. "You could have been with your Papa. Isn't that what you wanted all along?"

El's mouth quirks up.

"... I already have a Dad," she murmurs, reveling in his shocked and perplexed expression. "I have friends. I don't need you, Papa." El smiles wider. "I'm not afraid of you anymore."

The door buzzes open, revealing two bigger guards. "You'll kill again, Eleven," Brenner warns her, sneering. "Nothing's changed."

Dr. Sam Owens grips into El's shoulder reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he tells her cheerfully, smirking. "He's gonna be locked away in a solitary cell *for a long time*, Jane."

El's faltering smile returns.

*Good.*

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Midspring smells like the overflowing lavender bushes next door, and a hint of warm, damp soil.

The hammock on the porch swings, slow and pendulous, as Hopper shifts their arms, pushing their tattoos against each other.

"Think my wings are crooked."

When his comment goes unacknowledged, he sighs in mild exasperation, crooking an arm round El.

"I heard about what Brenner said. There's nothing wrong with you, El." She glances away, stubbornly rubbing the corners of her eyes with her palms. "You're not turning *bad*," Hopper says, lowly. "I've killed people too, alright? For less of a noble reason than I'm sure you



have."

"... What did you do?"

"To make up for what I thought I did?" Hopper considers this, making a thoughtful hum. "I... became my hometown's police chief... I swore to protect innocent people..." He chuckles, tickling under El's armpit until she's squirming and giggling. "I adopted some kid living in the woods who is *obsessed* with Eggos."

"So you keep protecting the people you care about, kid. You defend them. That's what you can do."

El nods, smiling so much it aches when he kisses the top of her head.

"C'mere..." Hopper squeezes her into their half embrace, strangely misty-eyed. "I love you, okay? So much."

"I love you, too," she whispers, burrowing in the hammock, laying her head against her Dad.

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Mike ends up in the hospital for a couple of days.

He's out of school for four weeks afterwards, needing time to properly heal his bruised ribs and chest.

"I cannot believe you got *shot* at," Steve mutters, clearly stressed about the news. He shoves another large handful of butter popcorn into his mouth, as everyone else chatters on and laughs. "Settle down, you snot-nosed shits, and pick a damn movie!" he yells over them.

Dustin waves his hands. "Episode V *surpasses* Episode IV, alright!" he says aggressively, making a face at Lucas. "Don't bullshit me!"

"How can you even think of saying that—!?"

"*Nerds*," Max whispers loudly in El's direction, earning herself a faint, amused laugh.

Mike shakes his head, protesting, "Dustin, El hasn't seen *any* of the Star Wars movies, so we gotta start with the firs—*aahh*," he groans out of nowhere, eyes closing helplessly, teeth gritting. Mike's hand presses lightly onto his ribs.

"Oh *crap*—"

"What happened—?"

"Mike, hey—"

"Are you okay—?"

"Mike—"

A trickle of perspiration forms down his neck. "*Mm'okay*," he exhales, taking shallow breaths, reopening his eyes. El grabs onto Mike's empty hand, staring in mounting, silent concern. To her relief, he gladly holds onto her.

"El, maybe he needs some water downstairs," Will suggests, clasping down Mike's shoulder. "You wanna walk him?"

She nods, helping Lucas and Dustin lift Mike back onto his feet.

The Wheeler's two-story staircase winds a little, and it's a gradual process, leading Mike to the kitchen island. Mike frowns, plopping onto a booth stool. "I appreciate it, but you don't have to treat me like a baby like everyone else does," he says moodily.

"You were hurt. They're worried." El passes him a cold water bottle from the refrigerator, frowning back at him and solemn.

"I know..." Mike whispers, tapping the bottle against his knee rhythmically, jittery.

"So much happened..."

He snorts softly.

El glances up when Mike grasps her wrist, turning it over to the dark, inked butterfly. "I knew what I signed up for, El. The moment I first

saw you in the woods," he admits. Mike's freckled face grins. *Pretty*. "When I saw a girl I didn't know all by herself, running through a thunderstorm in just a baggy t-shirt."

El's fingers clench at nothing.

"You were nice to me."

Mike flushes, nodding and looking down. "I, uh... had a massive crush on you, so..."

"*Crush?*" she asks.

"Yeah, it's like... I really wanted you to be my girlfriend. One day... I mean, if you wanted to."

El furrows her brows. "A girlfriend is... *better* than a friend? You kiss your girlfriend and take her to the Snow Ball, right?"

Mike laughs, dimpling his cheeks.

"Yeah, pretty much," he says, twisting open his water bottle and taking a few gulps.

"Then is Mike my boyfriend?"

The next mouthful of water partly dribbles down Mike's chin and the front of his button-up shirt. "*Wait*, you..." Mike blinks, amazed and smiling. "Do you want me to be your...?"

It's such an outright funny thing that El bursts out laughing, covering her mouth apologetically.

"Yes, Mike."

"*Wow*," he says, going dreamy-eyed. El's own face starts to pinken, flushing brightly.

Steve whistles from the banister.

"You two watching the movie or are you gonna need a babysitter down here?" he announces smugly, winking slightly in El's direction.

"... Steve, why are you winking?"

"To be honest, I don't even know anymore," Steve answers wistfully, motioning them to their feet with a misguided paternal determination. "It's obviously not working. You're hopeless."

Upstairs, Max and Lucas chuck popcorn kernels at each other, grinning so brilliantly. Dustin and Will shout the movie's quotes over everyone else, bouncing on the plush cushions. Steve tries to take away the popcorn bowl from the party, getting kicked in the leg and hit with a pillow.

El curls up next to Mike on the loveseat, tuning out the activity around them, resting her temple to his shoulder.

*Boyfriend.*

She smiles to herself.

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*Stranger Things isn't mine. I KEEP ADDING ONTO THESE STORIES! Well, just like I said before about El & Max's friendship, I can't wait another 1-2 years for El and Brenner to have that final showdown. I feel like it's so so so important for her to face the source of her greatest trauma and to be free of it. Obviously it's not that simple, but I'm also a BIG fan of angst and hurt/comfort. It had to happen eventually! If you liked this, please leave a thought/comment! All my love to you! :)*

*How are we doing after Season 2, guys? Still recovering? (BECAUSE SAME) What would you like to see happen in Season 3?*